



Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Training Do's and Don'ts

In recent years, the United States has seen a number of individuals in the U.S. become involved in violent extremist activities, with particular activity by American residents and citizens inspired by al Qaeda and its ideology. We know that violent extremism is not confined to any single ideology, but we also know that the threat posed by al Qaeda and its adherents is the preeminent threat we face in the homeland, targeting Muslim American communities for recruitment. Accordingly, it is urgent for law enforcement personnel to be appropriately trained in understanding and detecting ideologically motivated criminal behavior, and in working with communities and local law enforcement to counter domestic violent extremism. Training must be based on current intelligence and an accurate understanding of how people are radicalized to violence, and must include cultural competency training so that our personnel do not mistake, for example, various types of religious observance as a sign of terrorist inclination. Misinformation about the threat and dynamics of violent radicalization can harm our security by sending us in the wrong direction and unnecessarily creating tensions with potential community partners.

The Department of Homeland Security, in partnership with the National Counterterrorism Center, hosts an inter-agency working group to bring together best practices in Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) training. The group has prepared this suggested list of "Do's" and "Don'ts" tips for federal, state, and local government and law enforcement officials organizing CVE, cultural awareness, counter-radicalization, or counterterrorism training.

GOAL	DO	DON'T
A. Training objectives should be focused and clear	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Match training content to the audience member's jobs. Material should be relevant and useful to those being trained. For example, a program designed for counterterrorism (CT) investigators likely will not be appropriate for others. Training should meet your specific objectives.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Don't use programs that venture too deep into the weeds of religious doctrine and history. While interesting, such details will only be of use to the most specialized law enforcement personnel; these topics are not necessary in order to understand the community.
B. Training objectives should not have a political agenda	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Seek out training provided by individuals who belong to larger organizations with public constituencies. A training provider with a public constituency is less susceptible to interest group politics.2. Seek out training that provides opportunities for further learning and fosters self-study. These are complex topics requiring on-going learning.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Don't use training with a political agenda. This is not the time to try to persuade audiences, for example, on views about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, reformation within Islam, or the proper role of Islam in majority Muslim nations.2. Don't use trainers who answer primarily to interest groups. For example, trainers who are self-professed "Muslim reformers" may further an interest group agenda instead of delivering generally accepted, unbiased information.3. Don't use training that purports to tell students "all they need to know"; such trainers are likely more interested in sales than education. Trainers who discourage extra-curricular education are fearful of differing viewpoints.
C. Training should be sensitive to constitutional values	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Review the training program to ensure that it uses examples to demonstrate that terrorists span ethnicity, race, gender, and religion.2. Look for training that focuses on behaviors over appearances or habits.3. Look for training that supports the protection of civil rights and civil liberties as part of national security.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Don't use training that equates radical thought, religious expression, freedom to protest, or other constitutionally-protected activity, with criminal activity. One can have radical thoughts/ideas, including disliking the U.S. government, without being violent; for example, trainers who equate the desire for Sharia law with criminal activity violate basic tenets of the First Amendment.2. Don't use programs that generalize about appearance, national origin or other similar characteristics in an attempt to identify "indicators" or "types" of people likely to carry out acts of violent extremism. Avoid such examples—a change in beard shape, listens to hip hop music, from a specific religious branch, etc. These indicators are inaccurate.3. Don't use training that is overbroad, equating an entire religion, nation, region, or culture with evil or violence. For example, it is incorrect and damaging to assert that all Muslims have terrorist ties.
D. Training should be appropriately tailored and supported	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Check that training provides operational best practices for how to engage (e.g., shoes off in mosques in Muslim American communities) so trained personnel can confidently engage.2. Choose a training that is tailored to your audience, i.e. a training for intelligence professionals will stress terminology, whereas a training for law enforcement will stress interaction.3. Check whether the curriculum is in a standardized format with associated training materials. The training should include a summary, guides for instructors and participants, and evaluations.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Don't use training that is all "war stories," which may rely too much on outdated information and overgeneralizations. Regaling an audience with a blow-by-blow account of a 2003 terrorism investigation does not address the changing nature of violent extremism we face today.2. Don't use training that purports to teach psychological indicators of terrorism. Keep training programs focused on criminal behavior, not mental processes.3. Don't use training that reasons broadly from anecdotal evidence; e.g., Omar Hammami started to wear more religious clothing, therefore, starting to wear religious garb is an indicator of terrorism.

GOAL	DO	DON'T
E. Trainers and training background should be expert and well-regarded	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thoroughly review the prospective trainer's biography and résumé to ensure he or she has subject matter expertise and experience delivering training on that specific subject matter. 2. Check for media or other coverage highlighting either successes or concerns about the trainer or training. 3. Contact other agencies who have received training to get formal or informal feedback on the course or trainer. 4. Request student feedback when shopping for a training provider. The comprehensiveness of the feedback provided indicates the transparency of the provider. Comprehensive student feedback will reveal whether the curriculum is relevant for your particular objectives and whether the curriculum is politicized. 5. Observe training before buying, if possible. 6. Interview each prospective instructor about his or her experience in the specified topic, which should include education and work experience, not merely national or religious background. 7. Ensure that all written materials are reviewed carefully by persons with an understanding of the relevant communities. If possible, vet with trusted community contacts. 8. Evaluate the prospective trainer during and after course delivery, and act on the evaluation. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Don't assume that because someone is Arab or Muslim and has law enforcement experience that he or she is a qualified cultural competency trainer. (Note, too, that not all Arabs are Muslims and not all Muslims are Arabs.) 2. Don't use a trainer or training that has received repeated external negative feedback. 3. Don't use a trainer with a reputation for content that disrespects civil rights or civil liberties. For instance, trainers who suggest that there is always probable cause to arrest an individual who has multiple spellings and variations of his name violate federal law and long standing law enforcement policies and procedures. 4. Don't use a trainer who has no experience or subject matter expertise on the topics. For example, trainers who are teaching "counterterrorism" courses, but have no counterterrorism experience should raise red flags. 5. Don't use training that makes meaningless or overbroad conclusions about the connection between suspicious activity and culture. One example of such undersupported conclusions might be training that states that one lesson learned from terrorism is that some of the 9/11 hijackers had similar names. In reality, many American Muslims have similar names, and similar names do not indicate terrorist activity.
F. Training should adhere to government standards and efforts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure that the training aligns with the federal approach to CVE, including prioritizing civil rights and civil liberties and building partnerships with communities. (See the White House Approach to Countering Violent Extremism. http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/empowering_local_partners.pdf) 2. Note: Countering violent extremism programs differ from counterterrorism (CT) programs. CVE programs focus on developing trust, enhancing community resiliency, and protecting civil rights and civil liberties. CT programs focus on developing sources, investigating, arresting, and prosecuting criminal activity. Training objectives for CVE programs should reflect this approach. 3. Reach out to existing government training efforts underway for their sponsor's input. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Don't use a trainer who claims to have information better than the U.S. government or academics. Just because someone speaks with authority does not mean he or she has authority. 2. In line with the National Security Strategy, don't use training that treats the American Muslim community as a problem rather than as a partner. The President, the Secretary of Homeland Security, and the Attorney General have all stated that communities are part of the solution, not part of the problem. 3. Don't use training that relies on fear or conspiracies to motivate law enforcement. Don't use training premised on theories with little or no evidence to support them. Examples (from the report "Manufacturing the Muslim Menace") of unsubstantiated theories include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Many mainstream Muslim organizations have terrorist ties. b. Mainstream Muslim organizations are fronts for Islamic political organizations whose true desire is to establish Sharia law in America. Muslim Americans are using democratic processes, like litigation and free speech, to subvert democracy and install Sharia law.

Please see these suggested resources for more information on government, law enforcement, academic, and community best practices in CVE training and community policing efforts.

Federal Government

National Security Strategy, http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf

Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States, http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/empowering_local_partners.pdf

Department of Homeland Security, Fact Sheet: Approach to Countering Violent Extremism, <http://www.dhs.gov/files/fact-sheet-approach-to-countering-violent-extremism.pdf>

Remarks of Deputy National Security Advisor to the President Denis McDonough's on "Partnering with Communities to Prevent Violent Extremism in America," <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/06/remarks-denis-mcdonough-deputy-national-security-advisor-president-prepa>

Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services "Guidance for Building Communities of Trust," http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/files/RIC/Publications/e071021293_buildingcommtrust_revision.pdf

Homeland Security Advisory Council (HSAC) CVE Working Group Recommendations, http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/hsac_cve_working_group_recommendations.pdf

Local Law Enforcement

Los Angeles Sheriff's Department Muslim Community Affairs Unit, video on Law Enforcement Interaction with the Muslim Community, contact muslimoutreach@lasd.org

Academic

D.H. Schanzer, C. Kurzman & E. Moosa, "Anti Terror Lessons of Muslim Americans." Duke University. (2010), <http://fds.duke.edu/db/attachment/1255>

Community

Muslim Public Affairs Council's "Building Bridges to Strengthen America: Forging and Effective Counterterrorism Enterprise between Muslim Americans and Law Enforcement," <http://www.mpac.org/publications/policy-papers/building-bridges.php>